
The National Nutrition Safety Net

*Tools for
Community
Food Security*



United States Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service
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To lead America in ending hunger and improving nutrition and health.

■ Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services Vision

To increase food security and reduce hunger in partnership with cooperating organizations by providing children and low-income people access to food, a healthful diet, and nutrition education in a manner that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence.

■ Food and Nutrition Service Mission

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Preface

Each year the Federal Government invests billions of dollars in nutrition assistance for children and low-income people. For these resources to reach those in need, local communities all across the Nation must have an infrastructure that can deliver nutrition assistance benefits effectively. This infrastructure must enable current and prospective participants to:

- ▶ apply for and receive nutrition assistance benefits with dignity;
- ▶ redeem their benefits for nutritious and affordable food; and
- ▶ acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and motivation to make the right choices for a healthful diet.

These are some of the basic elements of community food security—a concept that includes both a Federal nutrition assistance safety net and local organizational and policy structures that ensure that all community members have access to a safe, nutritious, and affordable food supply.

We designed this tool kit to help communities assess if they make full use of the Federal nutrition assistance programs, to identify barriers to the food security of community members, and to seek opportunities for improvement. It is a product of *Leadership 2000 and Beyond*, an effort to adopt quality management principles in our mission to improve the nutrition of the Nation’s population and end hunger. Its creation was a team effort, brought into existence by staff representing a cross-section of Food and Nutrition Service programs, regions, and offices:

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Many others too numerous to name individually gave generously of their time, experience, and insight by reviewing drafts of this material, a gift the team gratefully acknowledges. Christine Krutzler and Yolonda Sylvia provided crucial logistical support to the team.

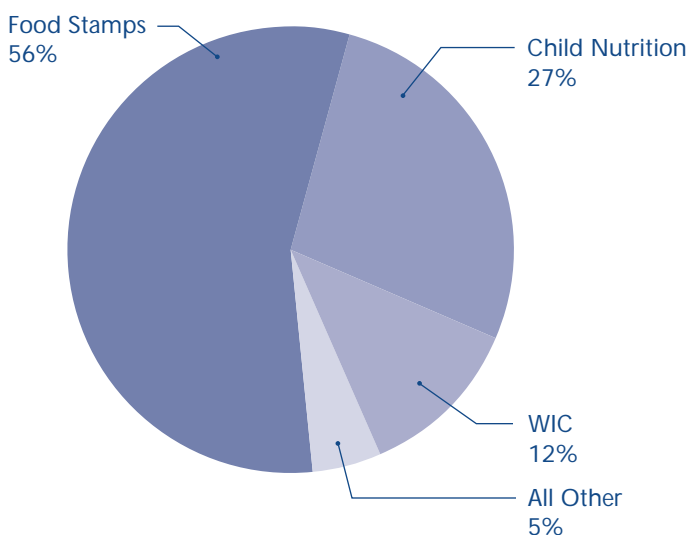
Introduction

Achieving food security for all Americans is a long-standing challenge. Over the past half century—beginning with the National School Lunch Program in 1946—the Nation has gradually built an array of basic nutrition-assistance programs to help achieve this goal. Taken together, these programs form a substantial safety net, supporting American families and individuals in their own efforts to escape food insecurity and hunger and to achieve healthful, nutritious diets. Currently, the Nation invests about \$35 billion annually in the nutritional health of Americans through these U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) nutrition assistance programs.

Moreover, the Nation's nutrition assistance safety net has succeeded to a remarkable extent in achieving its purpose. Hunger due to lack of resources to obtain food now occurs in only about 4 percent of all households in this country. In a country as wealthy as ours, that is still too much. Even that seemingly small number represents nearly 10 million people, more than one-third of them children.

Nutrition Assistance Program Funding

(Total = \$33 Billion in FY 1998)



Recent years have seen a renewed determination to finish the job of banishing the threat of hunger for every family and person in every community in America. We can see this determination in the creative and dedicated response of charitable organizations to help close the remaining gaps in the country's nutrition assistance safety net. It shows in the rise of the community food security movement and local anti-hunger coalitions in place after place. And it shows in the renewal of leadership at the highest levels of government to help this movement succeed.

The final job of eliminating hunger and food insecurity begins at the grassroots, within the communities where we all live. We must combine the substantial financial resources that the Federal nutrition assistance programs make available with the complementary resources that our country has always nurtured: dedication, caring, vision, creativity, leadership, and initiative to tackle a job and see it through. These vital intangible resources exist in abundance in American communities. If we can create new partnerships linking the powerful force of local responsibility and initiative with the resources of the Federal nutrition assistance programs, we will take a large stride toward eliminating hunger in America.

This recognition has led the agencies within the U.S. Department of Agriculture, including the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), to seek new forms of collaborations and partnerships in States and communities with local leaders, organizations, coalitions, and individual citizens who actively work to end hunger in America. This kit provides additional tools to help in this process.

The Nutrition Assistance Safety Net

The nutrition assistance programs combine broad, basic coverage with specialized programs targeted to particular groups with unusual nutritional risks—children, seniors, infants, women during and after pregnancy, Native Americans living on Indian reservations, some people with disabilities, and the homeless.

A low-income household with multiple needs often may qualify for more than one of the Federal nutrition assistance programs. However, program rules can be complicated and application procedures burdensome, so access to some programs can be difficult—especially for someone who is struggling with difficult life circumstances. As a result, qualified people may miss out on the nutrition support they need. When that happens, their communities miss out as well, both on the additional resources for food that could be coming into the community and on the higher level of health and well-being that full use of the available nutrition assistance programs could bring to the citizens of the community. The presence of a simple helping hand can make the difference for people or families in their ability to take advantage of the nutrition assistance programs available to them.

The nutrition assistance programs are a uniquely American invention, with nearly all the resources provided through the Federal Government but with most of the operational responsibility located as close as possible to the communities they serve. How well each program serves its clients in each community depends almost entirely on how well the local office does its part of the job. Some aspects of how the local offices run the nutrition assistance programs are mandated by law, with many designed to ensure that program resources reach the people who need them the most. Local communities can, and should, expect their local agencies to carry out faithfully the legal requirements of these programs and should hold them accountable for doing so.

Non-Discrimination

One important legal mandate common to all of USDA's nutrition assistance programs is the strict observance of non-discrimination among clients regardless of race, gender, or any other ground established in American civil rights law. Persons or groups who feel they have experienced discrimination in these programs should contact USDA at the address or phone number listed on the back cover of this tool kit.

Beyond the legal mandates, the local program office can do much to enhance accessibility and convenience for clients, maintain high standards of courtesy and respect in its treatment of both clients and staff, and be alert to unmet food security needs within the community. The aim of this tool kit is to help the whole community—program providers, participants, anti-hunger advocates, service organizations, public officials, and concerned citizens—identify and fulfill this potential of USDA's nutrition assistance programs. Mutual collaboration between local program offices and community partners can accomplish much more than the legal mandates. This tool kit aims to help stimulate a joint commitment to seek creative solutions to the unmet food security needs within our communities.



AN EXAMPLE OF THE NUTRITION SAFETY NET AT WORK:

To see how the network of programs can help households at risk, consider a mother with two young children striving to make a successful transition from welfare to full-time work. If her job pays minimum wage, her monthly earnings are \$886, or 77 percent of the official poverty line. Food stamps can provide the essential base of nutrition support for this family, adding about \$160 to \$325 in monthly purchasing power, depending on the family's shelter and child-care costs. Food stamp benefits supplement the family's food budget by \$0.59 to \$1.20 per person per meal.

If the children are younger than 5 years old, they may also qualify for Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits of targeted foods, adding another \$25 to \$50 per month per eligible child. If the children are in school, free meals through the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs can add additional support worth about \$0.90 to \$1.10, on average, per child per meal. If the children are in day care or after-school programs, they also may benefit from the Child and Adult Care Food Program. If the community has a Summer Food Program in place, it too can serve part of the children's food needs.

Altogether, this combination of modest food benefits—the Nation's nutrition assistance safety net—can help strengthen the ability of this family to succeed at the demanding transition from welfare to work.

Using This Tool Kit

This tool kit contains a set of checklists you can use to assess how well your community uses USDA's nutrition assistance programs. These checklists will help you spot potential barriers to participation that may cause eligible people to miss out on benefits—and from which your whole community would benefit. The checklists highlight a variety of ways to strengthen these program operations in your community.

For example:

- ☐ Does the food stamp office in your community make it convenient for working families to apply for food stamps by providing evening and weekend hours and by informing working people of their possible food stamp eligibility? Does any group or coalition in your community help the local food stamp office reach out to potentially eligible working people?
- ☐ Does the school lunch program in your community take advantage of direct certification for certain students, reducing paperwork for both families and schools? Do your schools integrate student meal programs with nutrition education activities, helping children develop healthy lifelong eating habits? Do they offer a school breakfast?
- ☐ Does your community have active programs of public information, outreach, and service to low-income pregnant women and families with young children about their potential eligibility for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits? Are systems in place to refer potentially eligible women to WIC, especially during early months of pregnancy? Do community groups participate in these activities?
- ☐ Do day care providers in your community take advantage of the Child and Adult Care Food Program to provide nutritious meals and snacks to the children and adults in their care?

Give Us Your Feedback:

Please tell us what you think about this tool kit and share with us stories of your success. Does it meet your needs? Can we improve it? What would you like to see that isn't here? In particular, we would like to gather practical examples of communities that make the kinds of efforts identified in this tool kit. Send your comments and stories to:

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Food Stamp Program

The Food Stamp Program is the first line of defense against hunger for millions of families throughout the Nation. Eligible participants receive benefits to purchase food at authorized food stores and farmers markets. Restaurants and group feeding sites can be authorized to accept food stamps for meals provided to the homeless, elderly, and people with disabilities. Eligibility and benefits are based largely on household size, income, and assets.

Over half of all participants are children, one out of six is elderly, and a third live in households with at least one person who works. Although the Food Stamp Program is designed to help anyone with little income and few resources purchase a nutritious diet, less than 65 percent of those eligible actually receive food stamps. Only one-third of eligible seniors and less than one-half of households with earnings participate.

Food stamps help those in need improve their nutrition and health. For children, a better diet means better learning in school. For adults, it means better performance on the job, or a better foundation for developing the job skills that can give them and their families independence. For seniors, it means access to a balanced diet vital to their nutritional well-being. For everyone, participation can help stretch limited budgets, improve nutrition, and reduce the risk of diet-related health problems.

Community Involvement

- ☐ Does your community have active programs of public education and assistance to inform people in need about their potential eligibility for food stamps?
- ☐ Has your community established public-private partnerships to support public information, education, and enrollment assistance?
- ☐ Is there a widely publicized toll-free number that people in need can call for local food stamp information and assistance?



Active community involvement is crucial to identifying, informing, and reaching out to people who may need and qualify for food stamp assistance. Many people eligible for benefits never receive them. Some may not be aware of their potential eligibility and the help that food stamps can provide. Some may not know how to apply or may find the application process too difficult. Some may find it difficult to get to an office, especially when the office is not nearby. Some may be stigmatized by the mistaken impression that nutrition assistance is the same as welfare. Active community involvement in public information and assistance can help overcome these barriers.

Local Office Functions

- ☐ Does the food stamp office provide evening and weekend hours to accommodate the needs of clients who may be working, job hunting, or have child care problems during normal office hours?
- ☐ Does the food stamp office “outstation” workers at locations that accommodate the elderly, homebound, people with disabilities, and rural clients?

- ☐ Does the local food stamp office accommodate the needs of clients when scheduling appointments, promptly reschedule missed appointments, and accept “walk-in” applicants on an emergency basis?

Flexible office hours, locations, and scheduling policies are a basic characteristic of high-quality customer service. Although not required by current regulations, these services enhance client access. Clients can find it difficult and costly to take time off from work. Impaired mobility is often a problem for the elderly and people with disabilities. Day care schedules can often constrain working parents.

- ☐ Does the local food stamp office actively seek feedback on customer satisfaction with the services it provides?

The best way to find out if the services provided meet customer needs is to ask. Local food stamp offices should provide a means for measuring customer satisfaction in order to foster high-quality service.

Enrollment Assistance

- ☐ Does the food stamp office provide applications for food stamps on request? **REQUIRED**
- ☐ Does the food stamp office always inform clients that they can apply for benefits immediately by signing an application? **REQUIRED**
- ☐ Does the food stamp office determine quickly if applicants are eligible for expedited service? **REQUIRED**
- ☐ Does the food stamp office provide a user-friendly checklist of documentation needed to complete an application?

- ☐ How fast does the food stamp office process applications?

Food stamp offices must provide applications on request, in person, or by mail. Offices should make applications and program-related materials available in appropriate languages other than English. Community groups can distribute food stamp applications outside of the office. Clients are entitled to file an application the same day they request one, an important right because benefits are retroactive to the date of application. Local offices must reach a decision on each application within 30 days. Some households with very low income and limited resources may qualify for expedited benefits within 7 days. However, most applications can be processed much more quickly.

- ☐ Does your community offer food stamp application assistance services?
- ☐ Does your community have pre-screening services available to help clients determine potential eligibility?

Many people who need food stamps are discouraged or overwhelmed by the application process. They may lack transportation, telephones, copying machines, and child care. They may lack adequate life skills such as the ability to read, follow directions, or overcome fears on their own. Some may be too ill to complete the application process. Supportive assistance from the community can help.

- ☐ Are clients clearly informed of their right to a fair hearing? **REQUIRED**

If clients encounter unfair treatment or believe their food stamp applications have not been handled properly, they have the right to request a fair hearing. Clients can contact the local food stamp office in writing or verbally. The fair hearing is conducted with an impartial official who is required by law to review the facts of every case in a fair and objective manner.

Referrals

- ☐ Does the food stamp office “outstation” case-workers in other agencies and locations serving the same population?
- ☐ Does the food stamp office have agreements and procedures in place with other agencies to make referrals to appropriate services and programs?
- ☐ Does the food stamp office regularly inform families with children that they may be automatically eligible for free school meals and WIC benefits and refer them to the appropriate office?

People in need seek out assistance in a variety of locations: social security offices, food pantries, meal programs, health clinics, elderly feeding programs, and community centers. Appropriate program referrals can help meet client needs as effectively and conveniently as possible. For example, children in families enrolled in the Food Stamp Program may be automatically eligible for free school meals. Similarly, pregnant women, infants, and young children may be automatically eligible for supplemental nutrition benefits through the WIC Program. The food stamp office can work actively with school and public health officials to ensure that they share necessary information across agencies to maximize use of the nutrition assistance programs.

Managing the Transition From Welfare to Work

- ☐ Does the food stamp office routinely inform people who leave welfare that they may still be eligible for food stamps?

Proper nutrition and sufficient food are as critical to the successful transition from welfare to work as child care and health insurance. The importance of nutrition support may not diminish as families leave welfare for jobs. For some, working full time throughout the year at minimum wage is not enough to lift their families out of poverty; they continue to need

nutrition assistance. However, many families leave welfare with the mistaken impression that they are no longer eligible for food stamps once they find work. The local food stamp office can correct this misperception by informing families of the possibility of continued eligibility.

Services to Immigrants

- ☐ Does the local food stamp office provide program information in appropriate languages to immigrants and their children about their potential eligibility for food stamps?
- ☐ Does your State take advantage of the option to provide food stamp benefits to immigrants with State funds if they do not qualify for the Federal program?

Many legal immigrants may be confused about their eligibility for food stamp benefits. While many are no longer eligible, some still are. Children born in the United States to immigrant parents are eligible for food stamps even if their parents are not. Recent regulations issued by the Federal Government ensure that immigrants' participation in the Food Stamp Program (or other nutrition assistance programs) will not adversely affect their immigration status. States may also exercise their option to offer supplemental nutrition assistance with State funding for some immigrants who are no longer eligible for participation in the Federal program.

Nutrition Education

- ☐ Does your community have a nutrition education program readily available to food stamp participants? Is it coordinated with other nutrition education activities provided by WIC, USDA's |Extension Service, and FNS' Team Nutrition?

Because there is a strong link between good nutrition and good health, food stamp recipients should receive guidance on how to stretch their food dollars, make healthful food choices, and prepare foods safely.

FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Seek out local community, religious, and other organizations to form partnerships dedicated to improving program availability and service.
- Build partnerships with local and State food stamp offices to establish programs of public information, outreach, and enrollment assistance.
- Build partnerships with civic leaders to raise awareness and understanding of the importance of nutrition assistance programs to the health and well-being of all individuals.

FNS CAN HELP:

- More information about the Food Stamp Program is available at www.fns.usda.gov/fsp.
- Policies announced in July 1999 will help ensure working families access to food stamps by making it easier to own a car and still be eligible for food stamps, simplifying reporting requirements, and creating a nationwide public education campaign and toll-free hotline (1-800-221-5689) to help people find out if they are eligible for food stamps.
- Informational posters, brochures, and flyers can be readily downloaded from the FNS web site. Separate materials appropriate for the general public, the working poor, seniors, and immigrants are available in both English and Spanish. A CD-ROM containing the complete camera-ready printing files is available to those able to print this material commercially. Look for the materials at www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/fsp-outreach1.
- *Preparing Nutritious Meals at Minimal Costs* provides information for educators and others to teach people on a tight budget how to prepare foods for a healthful diet. The booklet contains two sample meal plans (two weekly menus, 40 recipes, and two food lists), tips for nutritious meals at minimal costs, and a resource list for additional information. You can download the booklet in PDF format from the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion web site (www.usda.gov/cnpp). For single copies, call 202-418-2312.
- The Food and Nutrition Information Center home page is a great place to start your search for nutrition information. It has many publications on nutrition and provides an excellent jumping off point for other good sources of nutrition information. Through a partnership with FNS, the Food and Nutrition Information Center provides direct loans of materials to people working for many USDA nutrition assistance programs. Check out its web site at www.nal.usda.gov/fnic.

National School Lunch Program

Each school day about 25 million children in 95,000 schools eat nutritious lunches provided through the National School Lunch Program. These lunches must meet the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and other nutrition standards. To help schools meet these requirements, USDA began its Team Nutrition initiative. Team Nutrition helps schools, parents, and the community improve meals and promote the health and education of schoolchildren nationwide. Nutritious school meals, supplemented with nutrition education, can form life-long, healthful eating habits.

More than half of the lunches served in the National School Lunch Program are free or at reduced price. USDA provides cash reimbursement and commodity foods to help support nonprofit food services in elementary and secondary schools and residential child care institutions.

Community Involvement

- ☐ Does your local school participate in the National School Lunch Program?

While all public and nonprofit private schools may participate in the National School Lunch Program, participation is not mandatory. Schools that do not participate miss an opportunity to provide balanced, nutritious meals to students. Schools that do participate receive Federal cash reimbursements for all student meals served regardless of the household's income.



- ☐ Is the community actively involved in the National School Lunch Program?

Your local school may welcome active community involvement in the lunch program to promote healthful eating and nutrition education. This could include a wide range of activities from volunteering in the cafeteria and attending special events (e.g., Grandparents Day) to simply taking time to read lunch information sent home by school staff. Community partners—including businesses, organizations, farmers, and local chefs—could provide classroom demonstrations, support taste tests, or provide funds to support nutrition activities.

- ☐ Is the school lunch program used to help engage students in learning about nutrition and the importance of good nutrition in their own lives?

Facilitating Program Participation

- ☐ Does your school make sure that students eligible for free meals get them by using direct certification?
- ☐ Has your school requested approval to use simplified, alternative counting, and claiming methods known as Provisions 2 and 3?

Program rules allow the direct certification of students for free meals if they receive food stamps or Temporary Assistance For Needy Families (TANF) or participate in the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations. Direct certification requires the cooperation of the school district, food stamp or TANF office, and the State administering agency. Use of direct certification relieves both the household and school from application paperwork.

Under Provisions 2 and 3, schools provide free meals to all students, regardless of household income. These provisions have proven especially useful in schools with high enrollments of low-income families. A school is responsible for funding meals served to students not eligible for free or reduced-price benefits.

- ☐ Does your school ensure the confidentiality of students receiving free or reduced-price meals?

REQUIRED

When serving meals, schools must maintain the confidentiality of a student's meal benefit level. Overly identifying students eligible for free or reduced-price meals may stigmatize some. Students eligible for free or reduced-price meals must not have their names published, posted, or announced in any manner; be overtly identified through the use of special tokens, tickets, or any other means; be required to work for their meal; be required to use a separate dining area, go through a separate serving line, enter the dining area through a separate entrance, or consume their meals at a different time; or be offered meal choices different from those offered to children who pay the full price.

Eating Environment

- ☐ Does your local school provide an adequate amount of time for students to eat?

REQUIRED

- ☐ Can students eat their meals in a clean and pleasant environment?

Like adults, children benefit more if they can relax, eat, and socialize without feeling rushed. Schools should give students enough time for lunch.



- ☐ Does your local school offer a variety of healthful menu choices on the serving line and in vending machines?

Today's students have diverse eating preferences. Choices of entrees, fruits, vegetables, breads, and types of milk allow students to choose their

favorites while encouraging them to taste new foods. Vending machines should also offer students healthful foods. Low-nutrition snack foods and beverages that compete with nutritious school meals send students mixed messages and discourage healthful eating.

Nutrition Education

- ☐ Is your local school part of Team Nutrition?

Those schools that make a commitment to provide healthful school meals may enroll in Team Nutrition. Team Nutrition provides free nutrition education, training, and technical assistance materials to enrolled schools. Team Nutrition seeks to improve the health and education of children by creating public and private partnerships that promote food choices for a healthful diet through the media, schools, families, and the community.

- ☐ Does your local school provide nutrition education to students?

A successful nutrition education program encourages teachers to collaborate with school food service staff. Teachers can coordinate classroom lessons with food served in the cafeteria (e.g., determining the percentage of calories obtained from fat in a given meal or visually displaying the amount of sugar found in certain foods and beverages).

After-School Snacks

- ☐ Does your local school provide after-school snacks to students?

Many schools now offer after-school enrichment and recreation programs. Recent legislation allows schools to receive Federal cash reimbursement under the National School Lunch Program for all snacks served that meet program requirements. Healthful snacking contributes to healthful eating patterns. Nutritious snacks also help children learn the importance of eating well every day.

NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Discuss school meals with your child to obtain insight into the choices and quality of the meals served.
- Visit your school cafeteria and get to know the staff. Let them know you value their services and appreciate good nutrition for your child. If possible, eat lunch at school with your child.
- Practice what you preach: serve nutritious meals at home.
- Participate in local school board and PTA/PTO meetings and seek the commitment of the superintendent, principal, and school board to improve meal quality and provide a healthful eating environment.
- Build partnerships between school staff, local businesses, community leaders, parents, and students to strengthen program service and nutrition education.
- Link agriculture to the classroom through a school garden project, farmers market activity, or consumption of locally grown produce.

FNS CAN HELP:

- More information about the National School Lunch Program is available at www.fns.usda.gov/cnd.
- Team Nutrition provides a wide range of nutrition education, training, and technical assistance materials. Check out FNS' web site for resources on nutrition education for children and their parents, school and community support for healthful eating and physical activity, and training and technical assistance for food service professionals (www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/index.htm).
- USDA developed the Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children to help improve the diets of children ages two to six. The new pyramid is an adaptation that simplifies the educational message and focuses on young children's food preferences and nutrition requirements. *Tips for Using the Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* is available on USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion web site (www.usda.gov/cnpp).
- The Healthy School Meals Resource System is a searchable site providing information to people working in child nutrition. Check out www.nal.usda.gov:8001.
- Food storage, handling, and cooking techniques for schools are outlined in USDA's *Serving It Safe* handbook, designed to reduce the risk of foodborne illness. Information on food safety is available at www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources.

School Breakfast Program

Every school day 7 million children in 70,000 schools start their day with a school breakfast. Breakfast is especially important to ensure that children start the day ready to learn. Meals served in participating schools must meet the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and other nutrition standards.

Like the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program provides cash reimbursement to help support nonprofit food services in elementary and secondary schools and residential child care institutions. Any child at a participating school may purchase a meal through the School Breakfast Program, and low-income children may qualify for free or reduced-price meals. On an average day only a quarter of the students eating a meal provided under the National School Lunch Program also eat a school breakfast.

Facilitating Program Participation

- ☐ Does your local school offer breakfast?

All public and nonprofit private schools may participate in the School Breakfast Program. Nearly three-quarters of those that offer a lunch also serve breakfast. Some States have passed legislation that requires schools to offer breakfast. Some States and private foundations have provided additional funding for schools to establish a breakfast program.

- ☐ Are your community leaders aware of the importance of the School Breakfast Program?

A hungry child cannot learn and may also disrupt the concentration of other students in the classroom. School breakfasts provide children with a nutritious meal to begin their day.

- ☐ Is your school working to overcome barriers that prevent schools from serving breakfast to children?

You can overcome barriers such as a poor school food service image, the perception that school breakfast is only for low-income households, the difficulty of arranging bus schedules, and lack of time. Some schools have overcome these barriers by using student food preference surveys, developing brochures or public service announcements, using vendor carts or classrooms to serve and eat, and serving breakfast before school or after school begins.



SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- ▶ Participate in local school board and PTA/PTO meetings and discuss the importance of the School Breakfast Program.
- ▶ Be a role model for children by eating a nutritious breakfast every day and paying attention to what they eat.
- ▶ Discuss school meals with your children to obtain their insight on the choices and quality of the meals served.

FNS CAN HELP:

- ▶ More information about the School Breakfast Program is available at www.fns.usda.gov/cnd.
- ▶ Check out *Time for Breakfast* on the FNS web site for information on the importance of school breakfast and other useful resources (www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Breakfast).
- ▶ The 5-Star Child Nutrition Task Force in the Midwest Region has created a new resource to help you promote a School Breakfast Program, *School Breakfast Toolkit for First Class Learning*. It is available from the National Food Service Management Institute at 1-800-321-3054.

Summer Food Service Program

The Summer Food Service Program provides free, nutritious meals to school-aged children in low-income areas during school vacations. Locally, approved sponsors operate the program. They receive reimbursement for the meals they serve and their operating costs. Sponsors may be schools, units of local government, public or nonprofit private residential summer camps, other nonprofit private organizations, and colleges or universities participating in the National Youth Sports Program. Any child may receive a free meal at an approved open site without the need to apply.

Program Access

- ☐ Do summer feeding sites currently serve low-income areas of your community? If not, can your community identify areas where these sites are needed?

A feeding site is the physical location where sponsors serve summer meals. A site can be a school, summer day camp, residential summer camp, park, community center, housing project, church, boys' and girls' clubs, YMCA, or migrant center. Most sponsors open summer feeding sites near a concentration of low-income children. A potential sponsor can approach local school districts to identify neighborhood schools where more than 50 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches. This information can help sponsors determine where to focus their efforts.

- ☐ Do feeding sites operate only during the summer months?

Despite its name, the Summer Food Service Program can operate year 'round in some places. Where schools operate on a 12-month school calendar, approved sites may serve meals at any time during the year when some portion of the student body is on a scheduled school break.

- ☐ Does your local school district sponsor a summer meal program at a neighborhood school or at a nearby location?



Schools are desirable sponsors for two reasons. They may have experience with the National School Lunch Program, which has similar meal requirements, and they may have local or central kitchen facilities, trained food service staff, and knowledge of sound nutrition principles.

- ☐ Are summer meals available at local recreation programs?

Many parks and recreation departments run summer programs for children but do not provide meal service. A school or other organization could collaborate with one of these departments to provide meals or open a feeding site for the children enrolled in a summer recreation program. Sites may have difficulty attracting participants solely for a meal, especially in rural areas where transportation may be problematic. Linking the summer program with a recreation or enrichment program can draw children and parents to the program and facilitate participation.

- ☐ Are organizations in small or rural communities participating?

In some small and remote areas, it may be difficult to gather a large enough group of children to support a cost-effective meal

program. Consequently, a community lacking a high concentration of low-income children might have a difficult time finding a sponsor or a local site. Recently implemented policy allows for mobile feeding sites in such rural areas. Vehicles can dispense meals at qualified sites along rural routes. In many rural areas, a sponsor might have to deliver meals to multiple feeding sites or provide transportation for children in other programs to the summer feeding site.

Nutrition Education

- ☐ Do feeding sites offer high-quality, nutritious, safe meals?
- ☐ Do feeding sites offer nutrition education?

The nutritional well-being of children can be influenced by both the amount and the quality of the food they eat. Children are more likely to eat foods that appeal to all their senses. They are also more likely to eat foods that they know will help give them energy to grow and be healthy. The special circumstances in which summer meals are served raise the importance of attention to safe food handling, storage, and preparation.

The summer program can also offer children more than a nutritious, safe meal. It provides an opportunity to teach children about healthful eating and reinforce healthful food choices. Quality meals and meaningful nutrition education activities attract children and keep them coming back.

Cooperative Partnerships

- ☐ Do potential sponsors have access to meal preparation facilities or meal service providers?

Some potential sponsors do not have kitchen facilities to prepare meals. However, this need not deter participation in the summer food program. For example, sponsors can contract with meal service providers to prepare and deliver meals to their feeding sites. They can also lease kitchen space from another organization and prepare the meals themselves. Securing cost-beneficial meal service for its participants can be the determining factor in an organization's decision to sponsor a feeding site.

- ☐ Do smaller sponsors have collaborative agreements with other agencies to strengthen program and administrative efficiency?

Some smaller organizations may not have sufficient resources to administer the program on their own. These organizations can collaborate to provide summer meal service. For example, one organization might have administrative experience and sufficient staff but no food service experience or available kitchen space. Another might have an available site but insufficient personnel to operate the site. A third might have unused kitchen space and trained food service personnel but insufficient numbers of participants to justify running a meal service during the summer. If these three agencies joined forces, they could provide meal service to their clients in a cost-effective manner.

SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Contact your local school district to see if it participates in the summer food program. If so, identify which neighborhoods are under-served. If not, encourage it to participate in the program.
- Determine the number of schools in your community where at least half the students enrolled are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals. Where those schools don't offer the summer food program, identify agencies that can offer this service.
- Contact State education agencies to encourage a Statewide campaign to promote school participation in the summer food program.
- Encourage potential local sponsors to participate in the summer food program and operate feeding sites in under-served areas.
- Encourage sponsors to reach out to families so that they know of the availability of the Summer Food Service Program.
- In rural communities, identify ways to provide transportation for the children from summer enrichment programs to a central feeding site or deliver meals to multiple sites.
- Work or volunteer at a summer program site for the benefit of your community.

FNS CAN HELP:

- More information on the Summer Food Service Program is available at www.fns.usda.gov/cnd.
- The Summer Food Service Program can make a difference to children in your community. [A Guide to the Summer Food Service Program](#) will show you how. Check out www.fns.usda.gov/cnd to see for yourself. You will also find a variety of important tips to help make your Summer Food Service Program a success.

Child and Adult Care Food Program

The Child and Adult Care Food Program provides healthful meals and snacks for children and adults enrolled in a variety of day care settings. It reimburses participating day care providers for serving meals that meet Federal guidelines. This Federal meal program operates in family or group day care homes, child care centers, adult day care centers for elderly and impaired adults, emergency shelters that provide meals to homeless children, and after-school programs that provide educational or enrichment activities.

The program improves the diets of children and adults in day care settings and raises awareness of good nutrition. Providers' participation in this program can be an indicator of higher quality day care. Meeting the minimum requirements (e.g., obtaining a license or alternate approval, serving nutritionally balanced snacks and meals in age-appropriate portions, adhering to strict meal plans, maintaining accurate program records) demonstrates administrative capability and attention to detail sometimes lacking in unregulated day care settings. Day care homes that participate in this program are subject to regular in-home monitoring. Providers receive training on nutrition-related and administrative topics.

Program Access for Parents or Caretakers of Children and Dependent Adults

- ☐ Is there an easy way for parents and caretakers to learn the identity of homes and centers that participate in this Federal meal program? (Sources for this information include child care resource and referral agencies, licensing units, and State education agencies.)
- ☐ Do child care resource and referral agencies routinely tell parents and caretakers about day care facilities that participate in this program?
- ☐ Do local food stamp offices, WIC clinics, and related health and social service agencies provide information on the Child and Adult Care Food Program to parents and caretakers who need day care services?

- ☐ Are there any public service announcements on local radio or TV or other advertisements about the Child and Adult Care Food Program?

The availability of lists of participating homes and centers and information on how the program raises the quality of care can help parents and caretakers assess their options when considering day care services.

Program Access for After-School Care Program

- ☐ Are organizations offering after-school programs aware that USDA will assist them in the financing of nutritious snacks?

Under this Federal program, institutions in low-income locations can receive cash reimbursement for nutritious snacks served to children through age 18 if they participate in an after-school education or enrichment program. Programs that offer only competitive sports are not eligible.





Program Access for Children Living in Emergency Shelters

- ☐ Are emergency shelters that provide meals to homeless children participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program?
- ☐ As a result of a new law that became effective July 1999, emergency shelters which serve homeless children and their families can participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Reimbursable meals and snacks may be served to residential children age 12 years and younger, migrant children age 15 and younger, and children with disabilities, regardless of their age.

Program Access for Day Care Providers

- ☐ Are day care centers operating in your community aware of the services provided by the Child and Adult Care Food Program?
- ☐ In States that require licensing for family day care providers, does the State licensing agency tell applicants how to participate in this program?
- ☐ In States that do not require licensing for family day care providers, is information readily available from the State on how to obtain alternate approval to participate in this program?

(The State agency responsible for this program is usually in the education or social services department.)

Improving access to the Child and Adult Care Food Program can expand the availability of quality day care for working parents in your community. Program participation sometimes requires that day care homes and centers acquire a formal license from the State or county in which they are located. In some States, a license is not required; instead, unlicensed homes may acquire alternate approval to participate, a process that usually involves a home visit.

Role of Sponsors

- ☐ Is there a sponsoring agency in your community that administers this program for homes and centers?
- ☐ Are sponsoring agencies receiving referrals from the State licensing agency and other child or adult care referral sources?
- ☐ Are sponsors actively recruiting day care homes to participate in this program?

Family day care homes can only participate in this Federal meal program under the administration of an approved sponsor. Day care centers have the option of participating independently or under the administrative authority of a sponsor.

Sponsors make the Child and Adult Care Food Program work. They monitor family child care providers for compliance with program rules, determine their total reimbursement for meals served, submit monthly food reimbursement claims for them, and provide nutrition training and education. Because sponsors receive Federal reimbursement for these expenses based on the number of homes under their sponsorship, they have a strong incentive to recruit new providers. States also play a role in matching

providers with sponsors. States with day care licensing requirements may automatically provide new providers with information about the Child and Adult Care Food Program and refer them to a sponsor in their area.

Effective Sponsors

- ☐ Do sponsors have staff expertise and materials available in foreign languages spoken in their community?
- ☐ Do sponsors support day care homes in rural areas, low-income neighborhoods, housing projects, and other historically under-served locations in your community?

FNS provides extra funding for sponsors to recruit family day care providers in rural and low-income areas. FNS strongly promotes the recruitment and participation of day care homes in under-served and low-income locations. Because many potential participants speak a language other than English, sponsors can increase the number of homes they administer that serve diverse populations by hiring staff who can speak, read, and write in the language of their community's population.

- ☐ Are sponsors and day care home providers offering nutrition education for program participants?
Are sponsors offering menu planning assistance to their providers?
- ☐ Are sponsors conducting in-home monitoring?

REQUIRED

Serving nutritious snacks and meals for children and adults in the program is an easy way to provide nutrition education. Learning that healthful meals taste good can encourage both children and adults to eat healthier, more nutritious diets. This can be reinforced through formal nutrition education, including lessons about the food guide pyramid, shopping for and preparing balanced menus, and the relationship between nutrition and health.

CHILD AND ADULT CARE PROGRAM

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Encourage your day care provider to participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program and urge other parents in your community to encourage their providers.
- Encourage local social service agencies to sponsor day care homes or have their day care facilities participate in this program.
- If your day care home provider or center already participates in this program, encourage it to provide nutrition education as a regular part of its program.
- Determine if family emergency shelters in your community are participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program. If not, encourage them to find out about this program.

FNS CAN HELP:

- For more information about the Child and Adult Care Food Program, including the name and location of the State agency that administers this program, see the FNS web site www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Care/Default.htm.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

WIC's goal is to improve the health of low-income pregnant women, breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding postpartum mothers, infants, and children up to their fifth birth-days. WIC provides supplemental foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to health care and other social services. Participants redeem vouchers at contracted retail stores for specific foods that contain nutrients frequently lacking in the diet of low-income mothers and children.

WIC effectively improves the health and nutrition of mothers, infants, and children. Women who participate in WIC during pregnancy are more likely to have infants with higher birth weights and less sickness in the first weeks after birth than low-income women who do not participate. WIC children are more likely to receive needed health services and experience overall improved nutrition, health, and cognitive development.



Community Involvement

- ☐ Does your community have active programs of public information, enrollment assistance, and service to low-income pregnant women and families with children about their potential eligibility for WIC benefits?

- ☐ Are systems in place to refer potentially eligible pregnant women to WIC during early months of pregnancy?
- ☐ Do physicians in your area know about WIC and regularly refer their patients who are pregnant to the program?
- ☐ Do agencies in your community that serve low-income populations regularly refer potentially eligible participants to WIC?
- ☐ Is there a widely publicized toll-free number that people in need can call for WIC information and assistance?

Active community involvement is critical to identify, inform, and reach out to people who may need and qualify for WIC benefits, especially women in their early months of pregnancy. Early prenatal care, including WIC, can improve pregnancy outcomes. Some people may not be aware of their potential eligibility and the help that WIC can provide. Some may not know how or where to apply. Active community involvement in public information, enrollment assistance, and service can overcome these barriers.

Local Office Functions

- ☐ Does the WIC office accommodate the needs of all clients by providing lunch time, evening, and weekend hours?
- ☐ Does the WIC office have satellite clinics for enrolling participants and issuing benefits several times a month in remote areas or areas where participants receive other services in the community (e.g., worksite child care, Head Start, or health care centers)?
- ☐ What accommodations are made for those participants who are physically unable to appear at a clinic?

Flexible office hours, locations, and scheduling policies are indicators of a high-quality WIC program. WIC clinics should have procedures in place to allow a proxy to attend a WIC appointment for a homebound or employed participant. Some WIC clinics have even been able to make home visits to people with disabilities.

Enrollment Assistance

- ☐ Does the WIC office take advantage of available medical information or provide the applicant with a medical data referral form to streamline the enrollment process?
- ☐ Does the WIC office provide certification materials upon request and inform applicants ahead of time of what will be needed to complete their certification?
- ☐ Does the WIC office promptly certify participants regardless of whether they call or walk in to the clinic?

WIC offices should try to certify participants in the most efficient and effective way possible. This may mean sending out portions of the certification paperwork to applicants so that they can complete it ahead of time. WIC clinics should try to make appointments for employed participants at times that accommodate their working hours. Using previously acquired medical data can streamline the application process. All WIC applicants must be certified or notified of their ineligibility within 10 to 20 days. Ideally, applicants should be certified on the day of their request.

Referrals

- ☐ Does the WIC office regularly make referrals to other nutrition, health, and social service programs?

REQUIRED

- ☐ Does the WIC office actively refer all clients who don't have health insurance to Medicaid or the State's Child Health Insurance Program? **REQUIRED**
- ☐ Does the WIC office screen immunization records and refer clients who are not up to date on their vaccinations?
- ☐ Does the WIC office work with social services to certify foster children who are less than 5 years of age?
- ☐ Does the WIC office work with homeless shelters and food banks to inform homeless women, infants, and children of their potential eligibility for WIC?
- ☐ Does the WIC office regularly screen for drug and alcohol abuse and make referrals or provide information on assistance for those in need? **REQUIRED**

Appropriate referrals can streamline the application process and help people locate and participate in all programs for which they are eligible. Homeless people may not realize that the WIC office can work around their lack of access to an adequate water supply, refrigerator, or cooking equipment. WIC offices can form agreements with other health and human service organizations to ensure they share the information necessary to enable clients to apply for all the health and nutrition programs for which they are eligible.

Service to Non-English Speaking People and Migrants

- ☐ Does the WIC office provide program information in appropriate languages to migrants and others who do not speak English? **REQUIRED**
- ☐ Does the WIC office inform participants that receiving nutrition assistance through WIC does not make an immigrant a public charge?

Some immigrants may be under the mistaken impression that participation in WIC is the same as welfare and could affect their application for citizenship. Immigrants to the United States will not be deported, denied entry to the country, or denied permanent status due to the receipt of WIC benefits. The local WIC office can also inform migrant and immigrant women and families with children of their possible eligibility for WIC in languages they understand.



Nutrition Education

- ☐ Does the local WIC office provide effective nutrition education and counseling to participants? **REQUIRED**
- ☐ Does the WIC office work with other nutrition education services, such as the university extension office, to maximize opportunities for providing information and education to participants?

Because proper nutrition is important to healthier babies and children, Federal rules require WIC local agencies to hire trained individuals to provide nutrition education and counseling to participants.

Breastfeeding Promotion and Support

- ☐ Does your community use the local WIC staff as a resource for information on breastfeeding promotion and support?
- ☐ Does your community encourage new mothers to breastfeed and support them if they return to work or school?

Many people recognize the benefits of breastfeeding—including faster recovery from pregnancy and increased immunity passed from mother to baby. But barriers can prevent some women from breastfeeding. WIC participants should receive counseling and information on how to breastfeed and the benefits of doing so.

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC)

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Visit your local WIC office to learn more about their services and obtain information to share in other areas of the community.
- Work with the management of the local WIC office to stress the importance of access to WIC services through lunch, evening, and weekend hours.
- Encourage women to seek prenatal care and apply for WIC as soon as they are aware of their pregnancies.
- Join a breastfeeding coalition or task force, such as La Leche League, to learn about and help promote successful breastfeeding.
- Encourage designation of a breastfeeding and pumping room in your office building to create a family-friendly workplace and foster better health for both mother and child.

FNS CAN HELP:

- More information on WIC is available at www.fns.usda.gov/wic.
- Call your local FNS Regional Office for a camera-ready copy of *How WIC Helps*.
- Call Best Start at 1-800-277-4975 for information on breastfeeding promotion and support.

Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations

The Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations provides commodity foods to low-income households living on Indian reservations and to Native American families living in designated areas near reservations. Many Native Americans participate in this commodity program as an alternative to the Food Stamp Program. Locally, Indian tribal organizations administer the program.

To participate, a household must have income and assets within specified limits and live on or near an Indian reservation. Participating households receive a monthly food package either from a central distribution site or by tailgate distribution from a truck. Each household receives foods that are wholesome, nutritious, and easy to use, including meats, vegetables, fruits, dairy products, grains, and cereals. Participants can select from about 60 food items.

Community Involvement

- ☐ Does your community or tribal organization participate in the food distribution program?

Active community involvement is critical to educate tribal leaders about eligibility for the food distribution program. Some tribal officials may not know how to file an application to enroll their tribe in the food distribution program.

- ☐ If your Native American community is located on or near a reservation that has a food distribution program, do your local agencies and coalitions publicly inform people that they may be eligible to participate in the food distribution program or alternate between the food distribution program and Food Stamp Program?

Some people in your community may not be aware of their potential eligibility and the nutritious food packages they can receive. Some may not know where to go to apply. Some may feel that receipt of commodities labels families as welfare recipients rather than participants of a nutrition assistance program.



- ☐ Do members of your community know where to go to apply for the food distribution program or when the tribal organization distributes commodities?
- ☐ If your tribal organization participates, does the distributing office accommodate the needs of all people by providing adequate hours of operation, flexible appointment scheduling, delivery to the homebound and rural participants, or assistance with transportation to the distribution site?

Tailgate distribution from a truck is a great way to serve the homebound and outlying areas of your reservation or nearby areas.

Enrollment Assistance

- ☐ Does the distributing office provide applications for the food distribution program upon request?
- ☐ Does the distributing office always inform participants that they can apply the same day they contact the distributing office and that they may be eligible for expedited service?
- ☐ Does the distributing office notify participants that they may designate an authorized representative?

REQUIRED

REQUIRED

REQUIRED

Distributing agencies must provide applications upon request. Clients are entitled to file an application the same day they request one. Distributing agencies must determine program eligibility within 7 calendar days and expedited service within 1 calendar day, excluding weekends and holidays. Also, the head of the household, spouse, or any other responsible member of the household may designate an authorized representative to act on behalf of the household to apply for and obtain commodities.

Referrals

- ☐ Does the distributing office have agreements and effective procedures in place with other agencies to refer eligible families to additional services and programs?
- ☐ Does the distributing office regularly inform families with children that they may be automatically eligible for free school meals and WIC benefits and refer them to the appropriate office?

People in need seek out assistance in a variety of locations: food pantries, health clinics, and community centers. Program referrals can help meet all client needs as effectively and conveniently as possible. For example, students enrolled in the food distribution programs may be automatically eligible for free school meals. The food distribution office can work actively with school and public health officials to ensure that appropriate agencies share the necessary information to maximize use of the nutrition assistance programs.

Nutrition Education

- ☐ Does your tribal community provide nutrition education?
- ☐ Does your tribal organization actively cooperate with the Indian Health Service, the extension service and other nutrition educators to improve the effectiveness of nutrition education services?

To help recipients make the most nutritious use of commodity foods, FNS makes important nutrition and health information available to recipients.

FOOD DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM ON INDIAN RESERVATIONS

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- ▶ Encourage Indian tribal organizations and State welfare offices to establish outreach programs and service areas.
- ▶ Discuss with tribal officials the importance of the food distribution program to the health and well-being of the people in their communities.
- ▶ Encourage Indian tribal organizations to promote nutrition education to help inform their members how they can alleviate diet-related health problems.

FNS CAN HELP:

- ▶ More information about Food Distribution on Indian Reservations is available at www.fns.usda.gov/fdd.
- ▶ FNS provides information about nutrition and suggestions for making the most nutritious use of commodity foods, including tips on safe food storage and sanitary food preparation methods as well as information on diet-related health conditions and lifestyle issues relevant to Native Americans. We also have published a recipe book, *Quick & Easy Commodity Recipes for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations*. Call your FNS Regional office for more information.
- ▶ Federal funding is also available to Indian Tribal Organizations and State agencies specifically for nutrition education. Tribal organizations can use these funds to provide individual nutrition counseling, conduct cooking demonstrations with program commodities, and develop new recipes and other nutrition education materials. Call your FNS Regional office for more information.

Nutrition Program for the Elderly

The Nutrition Program for the Elderly distributes cash and commodity foods to States for meals served in senior citizen centers or delivered by Meals-On-Wheels programs. USDA provides reimbursement for more than 20 million meals a month.

Congregate and home-delivered meal programs (including Meals-On-Wheels) are often very attractive to the elderly. Although all people 60 years and older are eligible to receive meals from these programs regardless of their income level, priority is given to those in economic need. Those who can are encouraged to pay for the meal. People with disabilities who live in elderly housing facilities, those who accompany elderly participants to congregate feeding sites, and volunteers who assist in the meal service may also receive meals through this program.

Community Awareness

- ☐ Are congregate feeding sites available to the elderly in your community? Are there underserved areas? Are there people on waiting lists?
- ☐ Does your community offer a Meals-On-Wheels program? How frequently does it provide meals during the week? Does it provide meals on weekends?
- ☐ Does your community reach out to the elderly in your community to promote congregate and home-delivered meal programs?
- ☐ Are there enough volunteers to adequately serve people who use the elderly nutrition program?

Sponsors who administer nutrition programs provide high-quality, well-balanced hot meals to senior citizens who might otherwise go hungry or eat poorly.



NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR THE ELDERLY

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- ▶ Contact your State commission or area agency on aging to obtain more information about programs in your local community.
- ▶ Look into expanding your current elderly nutrition program or starting one. Encourage people to volunteer with an elderly nutrition program.
- ▶ Volunteer to make home visits, deliver meals, and provide shopping assistance to the elderly and homebound in your community.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) provides nutrition assistance to needy Americans through the distribution of USDA commodities. Under TEFAP, USDA provides commodities to States for distribution to food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and other charitable organizations that prepare or distribute the food. These organizations often receive food from private donations as well. USDA also provides funding to State and local agencies to administer TEFAP.

Recipient organizations may use the food to serve prepared meals or distribute it to households for their use. Available foods vary depending on market conditions. Typically, canned fruits and vegetables and canned meats, peanut butter, and rice are available. If there are not enough commodities for Statewide distribution, States may rotate distribution of some foods among counties so that there is an equitable share among local organizations.

Community Involvement

- ☐ Do local food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens take advantage of TEFAP resources?
- ☐ Does your community provide information about emergency food sources for people in need and about their potential eligibility for nutrition assistance?
- ☐ Is there a toll-free telephone number for people in need to call for information about emergency food programs in your community?
- ☐ Are emergency feeding sites located in easily accessible locations? Do the hours of operation reflect the needs of your community?
- ☐ Are food banks and food pantries able to provide nutrition assistance?
- ☐ Do food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens in your community take advantage of gleaning and other food recovery operations?
- ☐ Do emergency feeding sites deliver to the homebound, people with disabilities, or rural clients?

- ☐ Are there enough volunteers and adequate equipment to serve people seeking nutrition assistance in your community?

Emergency food resources provide a means for families with low incomes to get through the month. Food pantries, soup kitchens, and other emergency meal providers offer important support to people with needs not met by other nutrition assistance programs. They should have flexible hours of operation in locations that serve the working poor, homebound, people with disabilities, and rural clients.



- ☐ Do food pantries and meal programs in your community treat all people who come to them with courtesy and respect?

The atmosphere created by volunteers and staff is important to the program support of those in need.

Referrals

- ☐ Do sites in your community refer recipients to other nutrition assistance programs?

People in need seek out assistance in a variety of locations: food pantries, soup kitchens, health clinics, and community centers. Appropriate program referrals can help meet client needs effectively and conveniently. Food distribution sites can work actively with public health officials and schools to ensure that agencies share information to maximize use of the nutrition assistance programs.

THE EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- ▶ Talk with your State officials about the possibilities of expanding TEFAP in your community.
- ▶ Partner with local officials to raise awareness and understanding of the importance of nutrition assistance programs to the health and well-being of your community members.

FNS Programs and Farmers Markets

Low-income consumers, small farmers, and communities all benefit from the availability of farmers markets. They are an enjoyable way for consumers to buy fresh, nutritious produce, for small farmers to have new outlets for their fruits and vegetables, and for communities to add to their economic base.

Community Involvement

- ☐ Are farmers markets available in your community?

Farmers markets have become a substantial sales outlet for agricultural producers nationwide. Farmers markets can help support local agriculture by giving farmers an outlet to sell directly to consumers. They also can give schools the opportunity to purchase fresh local produce for their school meals. And they promote expansion and diversification of family farms by providing an outlet for fresh fruits and vegetables. Farmers markets can also help promote nutrition education, wholesome eating habits, and better food preparation. Finally, farmers markets bring customers into the community, boosting the local economy.

Food Stamp Program

- ☐ Are farmers markets in your community authorized as food stamp retailers?

Whether a State issues food coupons or electronic benefits, the Food Stamp Program offers low-income consumers an opportunity to buy a wide range of fresh produce that otherwise would be unavailable to them.

WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program

- ☐ Does your State participate in the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program?

The WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program provides fresh, nutritious produce to women, infants, and children who are at risk for poor nutrition. The Farmers Market Nutrition Program gives WIC an opportunity to feature fresh fruits and vegetables in nutrition education activities to encourage participants to eat more of these wholesome foods.



FNS PROGRAMS AND FARMERS MARKETS

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Find out if there are farmers markets in your area. Support their efforts with your patronage.
- Contact your local FNS Field Office to find out how farmers markets or individual farmers who sell produce through farmers markets can be authorized to accept food stamps.
- Work with farmers markets and individuals to ensure acceptance of electronic benefits at the markets.
- Find ways that the community can help start a Farmers Market Nutrition Program.
- Search for alternate funding to expand the Farmers Market Nutrition Program.

Other Nutrition Assistance Programs

The **Special Milk Program** furnishes milk to all children in approved schools, camps, and child care institutions that have no federally sponsored meal programs. About 8,000 schools and residential child care institutions, 1,400 camps, and 500 non-residential child care institutions participate in the program. USDA reimburses schools and other providers for the milk they serve.

The **Commodity Supplemental Food Program** distributes supplemental foods directly to women, infants, children, and the elderly in 18 States and on two Indian reservations. Food packages are tailored to the specific nutritional needs of participants, and include such foods as canned fruits and vegetables, juices, meats, fish, peanut butter, cereal and grain products, and dairy products. Infants can receive formula and rice cereal. The program served more than 375,000 in fiscal year 1998.

FNS provides nutrition assistance for **disaster relief** to State agencies and organizations such as the Red Cross and Salvation Army in such emergencies as

hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and winter storms. Depending on the nature and severity of the crisis, USDA may provide commodity foods to shelters and mass feeding sites, give food packages to families in need, or provide them emergency food stamps. USDA and its partners feed tens of thousands of survivors of natural disasters every year.

FNS furnishes surplus commodities to **charitable institutions and summer camps** at no cost. A variety of nonprofit institutions that regularly serve meals can participate: homes for the elderly, hospitals that offer general and long-term health care, soup kitchens, home-delivered meal programs, and orphanages that do not participate in any of the child nutrition programs.

The **Nutrition Assistance Programs in Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands** provide cash or food vouchers in place of food stamps and commodities.



Other Tools

A number of other resources can help promote community food security. Here are just a few that might be useful:

Guide to Measuring Household Food Security

A reliable measure of the extent of hunger in a community is essential to any commitment to eliminating it. The *Guide to Measuring Household Food Security* gives communities and organizations a practical and powerful tool to quantify the severity of food insecurity and hunger households experience. By asking a representative sample of households a core set of questions, communities can compare their estimates of the local prevalence of food insecurity and hunger to national estimates prepared by USDA each year. The *Guide to Measuring Household Food Security* will be available on the web at www.econ.ag.gov/briefing/foodsecurity in early 2000.

Together We Can! A What, Why, and How Handbook for Working To End Hunger in Your Community

Together We Can is a what, why, and how handbook to help end hunger in local communities. This handbook offers step-by-step plans to combat hunger for individuals, community organizations, and experienced anti-hunger advocates. It outlines volunteer opportunities within existing Federal nutrition programs, provides action plans for specific anti-hunger activities, and catalogs resources available to fight hunger in communities, States, and the Nation. *Together We Can* will be available on the web at www.fns.usda.gov/fns in early 2000.

The Nutrition Safety Net*At Work for Families

*The Nutrition Safety Net*At Work for Families* is a straightforward guide to Federal requirements for processing applications and determining eligibility for the Food Stamp Program. The guide includes information on how States can work within the existing law to simplify the application process and reach out to low-income families with children. It discusses requirements and options that apply when families seek welfare, leave welfare, and have no contact with the welfare system. The guide also points the reader to various sources of funding that States can use to pay for outreach, training, and other activities to help bring their systems into compliance with the law, while increasing nutrition coverage for low-income families with children. *The Nutrition Safety Net*At Work for Families* is available on the web at www.fns.usda.gov/fsp. Look for the “Access Guide” in the Clinton Food Stamp Initiative section.

Community Food Security Initiative Action Plan

The USDA Community Food Security Initiative is helping communities build their local food systems to decrease hunger, improve nutrition, and help families move from poverty to self-sufficiency. The initiative is building vital links directly between USDA and nonprofit groups, private businesses, and ordinary citizens, as well as links among State, local, and tribal governments—all with one goal in mind: helping communities across America end hunger. The action plan is available on the web at www.reeusda.gov/food_security/actplan.htm.

Community Food Security Assessment Tool Kit

Researchers from around the country who attended a USDA-sponsored Community Food Security Assessment Conference in June 1999 are collaborating with staff from USDA's Economic Research Service to develop a set of indicators and assessment tools that communities can use to describe and profile their local food security situation. This tool kit will include materials for collecting new information from households, food stores, farmers, and service providers and guidelines for compiling and interpreting data collected by other government agencies and private groups. The tool kit will be available in summer 2000. For further information contact the Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Program office, 202-694-5408, or consult the food assistance briefing room on the web at www.econ.ag.gov/briefing/foodasst.

Making Sense of the Census

The U.S. Bureau of the Census has developed a web site to help communities access information it has compiled on population trends. The Community Profiles section is a great way to find information about one's hometown or any other U.S. city, county, or reservation. In particular, it offers a quick way to find out about the number of people living in poverty in a community. Other information available through the site includes business and economic data and special thematic maps that graphically display population trends. The site also has a basic search engine that allows searches by key word. It is called the American FactFinder and is available on the web at <http://factfinder.census.gov> (note there is no "www" in this address).

For More Information

U.S. Department of Agriculture:

Food and Nutrition Service

www.fns.usda.gov/fns

Northeast Regional Office	617-565-6370	CN, ME, MA, NH, NY, RI, VT
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office	609-259-5025	DE, DC, MD, NJ, PA, PR, VA, VI, WV
Southeast Regional Office	404-562-1800	AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, NC, SC, TN
Midwest Regional Office	312-353-6664	IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI
Southwest Regional Office	214-290-9800	AR, LA, NM, OK, TX
Mountain Plains Regional Office	303-844-0300	CO, IA, KS, MO, NB, ND, SD, UT, WY
Western Regional Office	415-705-1310	AK, AZ, CA, HI, ID, NV, OR, WA

Food Stamp Hotline 1-800-221-5689

Team Nutrition

www.fns.usda.gov/tn

Community Food Security Initiative 202-720-5746 www.reeusda.gov/food_security/foodshp.htm

Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service

www.reeusda.gov

Food Recovery and Gleaning Hotline 1-800-GLEAN IT www.fns.usda.gov/fns

National Hunger Clearinghouse 1-800-GLEAN IT www.worldhungeryear.org/nhc

Other Federal Resources:

Administration on Aging 1-800-677-1116 www.aoa.dhhs.gov

American FactFinder <http://factfinder.census.gov>

Children's Health Insurance Program www.insurekidsnow.gov

Congressional Hunger Center 202-547-7022 www.hungercenter.org

Food Stamp Program:

American Public Human Services Association 202-682-0100 www.aphsa.org

School Meal Service:

American School Food Service Association	703-739-3900	www.asfsa.org
National Food Service Management Institute	1-800-321-3054	www.olemiss.edu/depts/nfsmi

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children:

National Association of WIC Directors	202-232-5492	www.wicdirectors.org
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Anti-Hunger Organizations:

Bread for the World	1-800-82-BREAD	www.bread.org
Food Research and Action Center	202-986-2200	www.frac.org
Share Our Strength	800-969-4767	www.strength.org
World Hunger Year	1-800-5HUNGRY	www.worldhungeryear.org

Breastfeeding Promotion:

Best Start	1-800-277-4975
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Community Food Security:

Community Food Security Coalition		www.foodsecurity.org
USDA's Community Food Security Initiative	202-720-5746	www.reeusda.gov/food_security/foodshp.htm

Food Banks, Food Recovery, and Gleaning:

Foodchain	1-800-845-3008	www.foodchain.org
Second Harvest	312-263-2303	www.secondharvest.org
Society of St. Andrew	1-800-333-4597	www.endhunger.org



United States Department of Agriculture

Food and Nutrition Service

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